

*In this story, Emrick Jones describes his son Jacob's experience with HKNC's Deaf-Blind Immersion Seminar. June, 2017.*



During March 27–31, 2017, Jacob Jones's North Carolina based team had an opportunity to participate in HKNC's Deaf-Blind Immersion Seminar (DBIS), an assessment and training program for individuals who are deafblind and have intellectual disabilities. Jacob's team includes Emrick and Kathy Jones (parents), Cassie Black (caregiver), Dreama McCoy (Section Chief, Supporting Teaching and Related Services, Exceptional Children Division, NC Department of Public Instruction), Dorothy Snyder (Educational Consultant for Deaf-Blind, Department of Public Instruction, NC Project for Children and Young Adults Who Are Deaf-Blind, Exceptional Children's Division), and Alex Velez (NC Department of Human and Health Services, Deaf-Blind Specialist). Thanks to Marilyn Trader (HKNC, Regional Representative Southeast) for organizing this opportunity.

DBIS facilitates an intensive evaluation by HKNC specialists focusing on vocational exploration, lifestyle assessment, individualized communication systems, low vision and audiology assessment, and environmental modifications. In addition, support staff receive hands-on training and mentoring specific to individuals who are deafblind. This seminar is a one of a kind experience where two parallel evaluation/training paths coincide—one oriented to the focus person and one oriented to the support staff.

From our first arrival on HKNC's campus, we were warmly welcomed by the dorm staff who introduced us to our "home" for the next 5 days. Jacob, who is 22, was curious and excited about what was forthcoming. Following breakfast on Monday, we were met by some fantastic HKNK staff (Laura Rocchio, Mike Richardson, and Kathy Anello). Their plan was to make formal introductions, give an overview of the week, and gracefully begin the week's journey. Ultimately, Jacob had another idea . . . He promptly approached Mike and Kathy and asked very enthusiastically, "When and where am I going to work?" With that said, he quickly gathered his belongings and instructed Mike that it was time to go.



During the next 5 days Jacob had an opportunity to experience a variety of vocational opportunities including:

- Laundry Services at St. Francis Hospital
- Mail Services at St. Francis Hospital
- Cafeteria at St. Francis Hospital
- Shredding documents at a local law office
- Dietary Services, Industrial Dishwashing
- Food Services, preparing measured servings of juice and fruit at HKNC
- Managing vending and drink dispensing machines at HKNC
- Janitorial Services at HKNC

Intermixed with this vocational work, Jacob also received numerous evaluations by HKNC staff. Throughout the week, Jacob's NC team members met with HKNC staff to:

- Discuss common practices and strategies to implement in Jacob's community upon their return to NC
- Observe classroom instructions
- Observe and learn best practices for deafblind individuals



From Jacob's mother's and my perspective, there were two significant points that I believe set the foundation for a successful outcome. First, we were humbled by the hundreds of years of experience represented by the HNKC staff and by the compassion and personal commitment each person has for the deafblind community. It was quite a remarkable experience to have such a rich knowledge base in a single concentrated area and we were blessed to have open access to it all. Second, was to be immersed in a rich environment where all persons interacting with Jacob ONLY spoke and acted upon his ABILITIES. From these two perspectives alone, a whirlwind of discussion, learning, and experience took place.

A quote from Helen Keller appropriately summarizes the week:

***Optimism is the faith that leads to achievement. Nothing can be done without hope and confidence.***

From the JONES family, a great big THANK YOU to Jacob's NC based support staff and to all HNKC staff who made this a very productive week.

*As a representative of the NC Project for Children and Young Adults Who Are Deaf-Blind (NCDBP), I found this experience to be one of the most valuable activities I have ever had the opportunity to observe. It was a pleasure meeting the HNKC staff and watching them document Jacob performing a*

*variety of tasks. Following the immersion seminar, NCDBP continues to offer support where we can and to watch as the family and team pursues avenues of meaningful employment. We are planning to develop training opportunities for other teams in our state built upon the HKNC experience. – Dottie Snyder*

